

CONFESSIONS OF A BOOK LOVER

E. W. WALTERS



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CONFessions OF A BOOK-LOVER

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BY
E. WALTER WALTERS

With an Introduction by
COULSON KERNAHAN
AUTHOR OF 'THE FACE BEYOND THE DOOR,'
'GOD AND THE ANT,' ETC.

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To
THE MEMORY OF
MY FATHER

S. E. L. T.
1872.

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INTRODUCTION

BY COULSON KERNAHAN

I

PART of the present volume appeared in *Great Thoughts*. Yet here am I, whose name is associated—if at all—in the memory of readers with ‘little thoughts,’ and with booklets impudent in the slenderness of their matter, presumptuously standing forth to bow the public into the writer’s presence, and essaying to introduce the one to the other.

The necessary explanation shall be brief. I must have been a young man, and Mr. E. Walter Walters a boy, when he and I last met; indeed I am not sure that I altogether remember him. But his father, who bore an honoured name, I well remember.

The Rev. W. D. Walters and my own dear and honoured father were personal friends; and when the former’s son sent me a manuscript of a book, with the request that I should write an introduction, how could I do otherwise than accede, and express myself honoured by the invitation?

That I share all Mr. Walters's whole-hearted bookish enthusiasm, I may not pretend, for, as R. L. Stevenson says, in *An Apology for Idlers*, 'Books are good enough in their own way, but they are a mighty bloodless substitute for life.' So long, however, as the reading of it be not allowed to deprive either man or woman of drinking deep at the wells of life, there are few greater joys, for young or old, than are to be found within the covers of a noble book; and to the enthusiastic book-lover, Mr. Walters's volume should prove treasure trove indeed.

He drags (to use a phrase of Stevenson's) with a wide net, but his castings are made, for the most part, in the same waters. Of the literature of the time of Elizabeth, or even of Anne, he tells us little, and it is not until we come to Goldsmith, Lamb, De Quincey, Leigh Hunt, and, later, to Jefferies, Thoreau, and Stevenson, that Mr. Walters may be said to let himself go. What my friend Mr. Le Gallienne calls The Lilliput of Literary London, he wisely leaves severely alone.

That Mr. Walters has a pretty sense of humour is clear from the following passage:

'Here is a copy of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, "hooked" in the deep waters of a "penny tub."

It is calf-bound, mark you, and in fairish condition, though much stained with the passing of years. My heart leaps ; it is very old—a first edition possibly ! But no, it is anything but that. . . . Many of the pages are entirely missing, and others partially so. Judged by the books that surround me it is dear at a penny . . . *Paradise Lost* !'

The word-play is not unworthy of Mr. Zangwill ; but when Mr. Walters writes, ' I have frequently trodden snow-covered ground with my nose a few inches from an open book,' I wish him, for the time being, ' Good afternoon ' and seek other company, preferably that of some lover of the Emerson who wrote :

See thou bring not to field or stone
The fancies found in books,
Leave authors' eyes, and fetch your own
To brave the landscape's looks.

Or, better still :

Canst thou copy in verse one chime
Of the woodbell's peal and cry ?
Write in a book the morning's prime ?
Or match with words that tender sky ?

II

' I KNOW a pretty little edition of the *Religio Medici*,' writes Mr. Le Gallienne in his *Retrospective Reviews*,

' which has been quite spoiled for me by the astounding remark of its editor upon Browne's beautiful description of his life as " a miracle of thirty years"—yet its actual incidents justify no such description ! '

Mr. Walters will not thus spoil for his readers the work of the writers he loves. He strikes no jarring note. On the contrary, he is capable, when writing of books, book-making, and book-buying, of an enthusiasm which I envy as much as I admire.

' I have confessed,' he says in his chapter on ' Second-hand Books,' ' that *I* am of the company of book-lovers who delight in dipping into the " lucky tubs " to be found outside booksellers' windows. I know of no pleasanter way of spending a spare half-hour. Give me a few " loose " coppers, place my feet upon a likely road, and I am content. I am now, let me say, of the happy company of *book-fishermen*. And this, mark you, is fishing in real earnest, this effort to " hook " good food for the mind, to place in one's basket a " book that delighteth and giveth perennial satisfaction." '

The comparison of a book-seeker to an angler is as happy as it is original, and the phrase—though phrase-making must not be confused, as Leslie Stephen points out, with thought-finding—

'a book-fisherman' has something of Charles Lamb's own 'self-pleasing quaintness.'

Lamb would, indeed, appear to be Mr. Walters's favourite author. That he knows his Elia intimately and can interpret him aright to others is clear from the chapter on 'Books and Gardens.'

'We are told,' says Mr. Walters, 'that Lamb was a lover of towns and crowded streets. Would it not be truer to say that he was a lover of the conditions in which he chanced to be placed? London claimed him—for the sanest reasons, no doubt—and, lo! under his pen, London became a garden.'

This is truly and finely said. Of such acute and illuminative comment, there is no lack in Mr. Walters's delightful book, which should assuredly find a place in the library of book-loving women and men.

I

' HUMBLY TO CONFESS '

I

' HUMBLY TO CONFESS '

How ruthlessly Webster strips the word 'confession' of the tender associations woven around it by the hand of the gentle essayist ! A confession, he informs us, is the acknowledgement of a crime or fault, open declaration of guilt, &c. True, a brighter note is struck in further definitions ; but I cannot find in any book at my command a definition of the word as used, for example, by Thomas De Quincey. The fact that De Quincey took opium was, I believe, known long before he wrote his *Confessions*. He personally avers that his object was to emblazon the power of opium, not over bodily disease and pain, but over the grander and more shadowy world of dreams. He desired

Humbly to confess
A penitential loneliness.

And I take that to mean that he desired to admit us into the innermost recesses of his heart, to speak to us as one speaks to a bosom friend.

I plead, therefore, for a wider definition of the word 'confession'—a definition that embraces those 'gentle whisperings' which pass between bosom friends, the confidence that springs from the very roots of the human heart.

An eminent essayist of our own day has been pleading for more autobiographies of unknown persons. If I read him aright, he wishes that more persons, however humble, however obscure, would set forth their thoughts and experiences. He believes that such writings would make better reading than much that finds its way into print. There is an idea in some quarters that unless a person enjoys peculiar gifts of expression, or has achieved distinction in some walk of life, his thoughts and experiences are of no public interest. But there are, I am certain, many who would rather have the unadorned expression of a man's innermost feelings than the thoughts that flit so lightly from the mind of the accomplished *littérateur*. How many are they—men whose names are blazoned upon the roll of honour—who have confessed to a love for conversing with the ordinary man, 'the man in the street'! As for your 'men of letters,' you are well aware of their love for conversing with unknown and frequently humble persons, 'casual

acquaintances.’ And who shall say to what extent we are indebted to those persons for the thoughts which, having been selected and refined, sparkle like jewels fresh from the cutter’s hands ?

How numerous are the men who have read widely and thought deeply, and yet hesitate before expressing an opinion upon the most trivial matters ! Fortunate is the person who can induce such men to talk freely, to express their views, their secret thoughts, on this, that, and the other subject—their beloved books, their likes, their dislikes, their aspirations, their fears, their hopes. Such confessions should make good reading. By dint of a little gentle persuasion I have managed to glean ‘copy’ of this description, which I shall hope to set down in these pages, carefully avoiding meanwhile any mention of names. The mere thought of publicity would bring a blush to the cheeks of the good gentlemen I have in mind. I must adopt the plan of those ‘Knights of the Pen’ of whom mention has been made. But here the process will be reversed. Here the rich thought of others will come forth in homely attire.

I would, however, first inquire in what respect the lover of books differs from the rank-and-file ? What are his distinctive characteristics ? Langford

has declared that no matter what his rank or position may be, the lover of books is the richest and happiest of men. But is that entirely true? I confess that I do not find it so. The lover of books is, I fancy, grievously prone to hanker after the moon, or, to put it another way, to build wondrous fairy palaces, which he would fain inhabit and cannot. I fancy he is apt to suffer from a 'glorious discontent.' He is too imaginative, too sensitive, to enjoy the distinction of being the happiest of men.

Indeed, is it not a fact that we book-lovers stand in danger of falling out of sympathy with this rough-and-tumble old world? Certainly many of us resent anything that threatens to come between us and our idols. (I have friends, book-lovers, who as strongly resent an intrusion into the sacred nook that holds themselves and a book as they would resent the invasion of a foreign power.) Thus grows upon the book-lover an ever-deepening desire for solitude, for the quiet life. Others may, if they choose, jostle for the gilded things of life. He is for other prizes, treasures of the mind and spirit. He, for his part, prefers to saunter through quiet by-ways, knowing full well that prizes will rest in his path, and that these, which he need but stoop to gather, will prove abiding treasures.

Yes, certainly the lover of books is rich. Every true lover must in the nature of the case be that. Listen to Gibbon : ‘ My early and invincible love of reading I would not change for the treasures of India.’ How many have spoken in like manner ! ‘ You, O Books,’ cried Aungervyle, ‘ are the golden vessels of the temple, the arms of the clerical militia with which missiles of the most wicked are destroyed ; fruitful olives, vines of Engedi, fig-trees knowing no sterility ; burning lamps to be ever held in hand.’

I have a friend, a book-lover, who confesses that he acquired this love of his after having passed through the most painful experiences. Often he stumbled, often he fell, seemingly never to rise again. But, happily, he has reached safe ground at last. He is now the contented owner of a rich storehouse of books. But he confesses that he is not boisterously happy. He doubts not that others laugh more heartily than he ; that many have lighter hearts. But he, be it remembered, has passed through deep sorrow, has lost friends, home, wealth—all that men hold most dear. Without his books and all they have taught him his lot would be that of a wanderer in a wilderness. ‘ My books,’ he says, ‘ are my inseparable comforters—my friends,

companions, teachers, consolers, creators, amusers.' But he makes no claim to being a student, or an authority on books. He does not burn the proverbial midnight oil. There is nothing of the book-worm about him. He is simply a book-lover, and being such, enjoys the very best that books can give.

I confess that I envy the pleasure derived by this friend of mine from the little 'crackling' sound caused by the opening of a new book. It is the sweetest music in his ears—an overture composed of the most pleasing notes. And with what relish he enters into the entertainment that follows ! With what zest he reads aloud the choice passages ! The four walls of his library must, I fancy, have peculiar knowledge of 'the dainties that are bred in books.' They are his only audience. When friends are with him, it is they who must do the reading, whilst he plays the better part.

How many a tale such as this might be told ! How full of eccentricities is the lover of books, aye, and how full, too, of whims and fads and fancies ! Each one is for a particular type of binding. In no two cases can you find tastes exactly alike. One is for plain cloth, plainly lettered, another is for calf or russia, another for parchment. And

each one has his own views as regards size. Some cry out for books that can be handled with ease ; others maintain that the size of a book should suit the nature of its contents. And thus the battle wages, quite a long and wordy affair, before any question arises as regards the actual contents of a book. But are not these views concerning the make-up of a book healthy and desirable ? I seem to remember having read of men held in high repute who had marked preferences as regards the get-up of a book. Did not Charles Lamb maintain that to be strong-backed and neat-bound is the desideratum of a volume ? ‘ Magnificence comes after. This, when it can be afforded, is not lavished upon all kinds of books indiscriminately. I would not dress a set of magazines, for instance, in full suit. The deshabille or half-binding (with russia backs) is *our* costume. A Shakespeare or a Milton (unless the first editions) it were mere foppery to trick out in gay apparel.’

And what of the ‘ inside ’ of books ? What of their contents ? For my own part, I confess that, when pressed for a list of my favourite authors, I am at a loss for an answer, or, at least, for a satisfactory answer. The question is so pointed, the answer resting quietly in my mind so wide, so

shadowy, so needful of explanation. So much depends upon one's mood and environment. I require the opportunity to say why certain books appeal to me in certain moods and leave me untouched at other times. I desire to show that certain books, in order to be enjoyed to the full, must be read in certain seasons and under certain conditions. I wish to hold forth upon, say, 'Books and Gardens,' 'Unknown Books,' and so forth, and on the peculiarities of certain authors, giving reasons why I like or dislike their works. I wish to confess, to bare my heart. And that is too lengthy a process to cram in a direct answer to a direct question. Only this much can I confess 'off-hand': The books that please me most are *the books that speak to the heart*. Such volumes are my most highly treasured possessions.

II

BOOKS AND GARDENS

II

BOOKS AND GARDENS

The mind relaxing into needful sport,
Should turn to writers of an abler sort,
Whose wit well-managed, and whose classic style
Give truth a lustre and make wisdom smile.

COWPER.

I HAVE confessed that the books which please me most are the books that speak to the heart—books that greet one with the ease and familiarity of a friend. I desire to feel the humanity, the heart of an author. I desire to know that he is genial, kindly, well-disposed. I have no inclination for angry, fretful men of letters. I no more desire to meet such through the medium of a book, than I desire to make the acquaintance of quarrelsome individuals in the flesh. I, too, ‘find myself facing as stoutly as I can a hard, combative existence, full of doubts, difficulties, and disappointments, quite a hard enough life without dark countenances at my elbow.’ Give me pleasant company. Give me *gentlemen of letters*. Still, I have no taste for the company of the maudlin or weak-kneed. Robert Louis Stevenson

says that ‘we are all for tootling on the sentimental flute in literature ; and not a man amongst us will go to the head of the march to sound the heady drums !’ Note with what grace he makes the observation ! It is more in the nature of a good-tempered laugh than a growl. How gracefully he wears the title—a Gentleman of Letters ! How pleasantly he addresses us ! Little wonder if, in his presence, our failings are as open wounds. He has no need to probe. His gentlest touch is sufficient, more effective by far than the rough treatment of the irascible author.

Yes, for friends give me gracious authors. Give me the gentle Elia. Give me Jefferies, Goldsmith, Leigh Hunt, and De Quincey. These are the writers I would take into a garden on a summer’s afternoon. I need have no fear, whilst in such company, of the flowers being robbed of their fragrance. The song of the birds will not be silenced. The gentle whisperings of the trees will still be audible. The writers in mind are of the company who claim kinship with Nature. Whilst with them I may read and yet meditate. I may learn and yet hear and feel.

Where is the nature-lover who will not readily confess that when in a flowering-garden he is

frequently torn between his devotion to the book in his hand and the beauties that surround him? I confess that I, for one, like to mix 'the dainties that are bred in books' with the wondrous attractions of Nature. I am ready enough to take my favourite authors into a garden, but not so ready to give them my undivided attention. Another book—which must for ever remain unrivalled—claims my eyes, my attention. Richard Jefferies is pleasing, but not so pleasing as the beauties to be found in a garden. Goldsmith brings a warm glow, but see! the sun shines in the heavens. Lamb puts me in playful vein, but his tune is not so gay as the song of the birds in yonder bushes. The light touch of Leigh Hunt is delightful, but not so pleasing as the quickly shifting lights upon the tree-tops.

But it is good to have old friends at one's elbow. And if I am able to enjoy myself without them on a summer's afternoon, it is because they, on some winter's evening, have opened my eyes and quickened my senses. It is they, I say, who have taught me to love the beauties of Nature. I am familiar with their golden passages, and whilst seated beneath the trees can recall them at my pleasure, or, should the mood arise, read them again, and yet again. How good, for example, to

read such a passage as this: ‘There is something beyond the philosophers in the light, in the grass-blades, the leaf, the grasshopper, the sparrow on the wall. Some day the great and beautiful thought which hovers on the confines of the mind will at last alight. In that is hope, the whole sky is full of abounding hope.’

Still, one does not always experience a sense of loss when reading in the open. Far from it! The heavens are not always blue. And prate as we will about the subtle beauty of grey skies and leafless trees, we are at times willing enough to escape from them. I, for one, am glad under such conditions to warm myself by the light of a printed page. Happily, I am of the company of men who can walk and read, and have frequently trodden snow-covered ground with my nose a few inches from an open book. Believe me, he who can read whilst walking has a long pull over the book-lover who must needs have quietude and a bended knee upon which to nurse his beloved books.

There is a worthy and distinguished company of book-lovers to whom reading whilst afoot is not only uncongenial but impossible. I seem to remember a passage in which that great book-lover Charles Lamb speaks of his inability to enjoy a book

whilst out of doors. These, I find, are the words in mind : ‘ I am not much a friend to out-of-doors reading. I cannot settle my spirits to it. I knew a Unitarian minister who was generally to be seen upon Snow Hill (as yet Skinner’s Street was not) between the hours of ten and eleven in the morning studying a volume of Lardner. I own this to have been a strain of abstraction beyond my reach. I used to admire how he sidled along, keeping clear of secular contacts. An illiterate encounter with a porter’s knot, or a bread-basket, would have quickly put to flight all the philosophy I am master of, and have left me worse than indifferent to the five points.’

Thus the gentle Elia playfully dismissed the person who is pleased to boast of his ability to read whilst walking. Was there ever a writer so fastidious, yet so tolerant, so playful as he ? Speaking of the conditions under which certain books should be read, he says : ‘ Much depends upon *when* and *where* you read a book. In the five or six impatient minutes before the dinner is quite ready, who would think of taking up the *Faerie Queene* for a stop-gap, or a volume of Bishop Andrewes’ sermons ? Milton almost requires a solemn service of music before you enter upon him. Winter evenings—and

the world shut out—with less of ceremony the gentle Shakespeare enters. At such seasons *The Tempest*, or his own *Winter's Tale*. Books of quick interest, that hurry on for incidents, are for the eye to glide over only.'

I wish it was possible to add a few words from the same whimsical pen upon reading in a garden on a summer's afternoon. I have a friend who is disposed to think that such writing would contain little about books and *much* about Nature. We are told that Lamb was a lover of towns and crowded streets. Would it not be truer to say that he was a lover of the conditions in which he chanced to be placed? London claimed him—for the sanest reasons, no doubt—and lo! under his pen London became a garden.

It is well that some brave souls can make-believe that the noise of the traffic of a London thoroughfare makes good music!

It is well that some have the spirit to sound the 'heady drums.' But for my own part, give me a garden removed from the turmoil of a big town. I shall not then be over-particular as regards my reading. Let me drop in my breast-pocket a volume by one of the authors named, and I shall be content. I too shall then be able to say, 'It matters nothing

to me that the earth and the solar system are whirling through space at a rate of sixty miles a second, from no one knows where to no one knows whither, if I may sit in my garden (with a book for company) on a summer's afternoon.'



III

BOOKS THAT TEMPT

III

BOOKS THAT TEMPT

Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested.—BACON.

WHAT are the books that tempt? Are they the old, familiar volumes, old friends in old clothes—well-worn editions of the classics? Or are they those same old friends decked in rich and fanciful bindings? I am acquainted with a book-lover who confesses that he has no taste for the fanciful modern reprint. You may show him Lamb, or Hazlitt, or Hunt, or Jefferies, or Stevenson in the richest of binding, and tempt him not. He is not, he declares, to be caught that way. As well might the reader go arrayed in frills and furbelows to a masculine friend and expect to be received with decorum. This friend of mine, I say, is as contemptuous of the modern, richly-bound classic as of any other form of foppery. He insists on meeting his friends, whether it be in print or in the flesh, in unaffected, homely attire.

He will tell you that the ‘gentle Elia’ was of

the same way of thinking, and that he wrote in effect : ‘ How beautiful to a genuine lover of reading are the sullied leaves and worn-out appearance, nay, the very odour (beyond Russia) if we would not forget the kind feeling in fastidiousness, of old circulating library volumes ! How they speak of the thousand thumbs that have turned over their pages with delight ! of the lone seamstress, whom they cheered (milliner or hard-working mantua-maker) after her long day’s needle-toil, running far into midnight, when she has snatched an hour, ill spared from sleep, to steep her cares, as in some Lethean cup, in spelling out their enchanting contents ! Who would have them a whit less soiled ? What better condition could you desire to see them in ? ’

Fastidious readers who insist upon having new books, or books ‘ good as new,’ must, I fancy, feel a ‘ twinge of guilt ’ in the face of such humane sentiments. I confess, to my shame, that I am of the guilty company ; that I am fastidious as regards the condition of a book ; that torn, well-thumbed books do not tempt me, whatever their contents. And not only am I guilty, but would seek to defend my guilt. I protest that it is the pleasurable duty of the book-lover to keep his

treasured volumes in goodly condition ; that a cover is but a new home, and that when the old one has served its purpose it should be replaced as readily as one would find a worthy dwelling-place for a beloved relative. I like to see my friends in the best possible circumstances. I like to see them bearing a well-cared-for, well-favoured appearance.

I do not forget the ‘lone sempstress’ spoken of so tenderly by Lamb. I would have torn volumes repaired and shabby ones replaced in all circulating libraries. In no circumstances would I permit a treasured classic to go forth in a shabby condition. I would place new volumes, or volumes good as new, within the reach of all.

But it cannot be denied that many tender associations are woven around numerous aged, *well-preserved* volumes. Where is the true book-lover who could not give a list of such ? ‘Their very odour,’ he will tell you, ‘is beyond Russia.’ How sacred their well-preserved pages ! Your up-to-date reprints, with their fanciful covers, are no company for such. Their gaiety is shamed by stately calf-bound volumes.

Yes, there is a grave and sober dignity about old well-preserved books. It matters not whether they be bound in morocco, calf, or russia. The

sacred associations of old age are theirs. If we do not love them, at least we reverence them. ‘ What a place to be in is an old library ! It seems as though all the souls of the Bodleians were reposing here as in some dormitory or middle state. . . . I seem to inhale learning, walking amid their foliage ; and the odour of the old moth-scented coverings is fragrant as the first bloom of those scintial apples which grow amid the happy orchard.’

Yes, to many the old ‘ moth-scented ’ volumes are the books that tempt. I have a friend who has placed a standing order with a bookseller to supply him with all old calf-bound volumes to be procured at a certain sum. Dare I state the sum fixed ? It is counted in pence—pence only, mark you ! But as my friend has made no stipulations as regards the contents of the desired volumes, he has a goodly array of books, each one ‘ moth-scented,’ each one a model of dignity.

My friend, however, is not a great reader. He is not, I venture to assert, a book-lover. I fancy he should be called an antiquarian. Certainly his liking for antiquities is greater than his love for the contents of books. Books to him are rather furniture for rooms than for minds. Show him an example of skilfully ‘ tooled ’ calf, and you will

please him better than if you had voiced an inspiring thought. But wait ! I must hold my pen. Who can say to what depths of thought and feeling my friend is moved by the sight of his well-filled shelves ? Has it not been said that there is inspiration in a mere glance at old volumes ; that they seem to exhale learning ?

Still, I, for one, am ready enough to confess that old calf-bound volumes as such leave me unmoved. Too often have I, together with other lovers of books, found them dry, as well as dusty. I respect their age. I consider the mellowed calf in which they are bound admirable material. I admire their durability. But such features do not greatly tempt me. I am for volumes of homely appearance. My own coat being of simple homespun, I am more at home with volumes bound in cloth. Give me for my daily companions unpretentious books. Many in my possession cost no more than from two to three pence. For I, too, am of the company of book-lovers who dip at times into the 'lucky-tubs' to be found outside booksellers' shops. I confess, moreover, that I belong to the class 'of street reader who, not having the wherewithal to buy or hire a book, filch a little learning at the open stalls.' Often and often have I been tempted by the

well-worn volumes—so unpretentious without, so rich within—that await the attention of the leisurely passer-by. Two humble pence, and a mine of wisdom becomes one's own.

So much, then, for old volumes. Now, what of the new? What of the many dainty volumes sent out daily by modern makers of books? I am thinking at the moment of the men whose business it is to bind and print, who with amazing ingenuity send forth volumes having the appearance of jewel caskets—wondrous designs of every tint to be found on a painter's palette. I confess that I find such productions exceedingly attractive. I confess that I am frequently tempted by them. It would be good, I feel, to be the possessor of a volume of Selected English Essays bound in 'leather soft as velvet.' I am more fanciful in my tastes than that friend of mine who insists upon seeing his old comrades in well-worn attire. I like to see Charles Lamb strutting forth in purple and gold. I am touched when I behold the great men who reign in the 'world of the classics' standing shoulder to shoulder, arrayed in 'gorgeous confections' upon a shelf in a bookseller's window.

But I have no desire to possess the large and weighty volume that falls under the title *Edition de*

Luxc. I am not tempted by bulky volumes, however elaborately they may be adorned. I have no desire to undergo the painful experience of a certain gentleman pictured in *Punch*, who, after making valiant efforts to handle one such volume, was finally reduced to an abject state of exhaustion. Give me volumes of convenient size. Give me, I pray, volumes I can master.

IV

‘ OUTSIDE THEIR BOOKS ’

IV

'OUTSIDE THEIR BOOKS'

The first time I read an excellent book, it is to me just as if I had gained a new friend.—GOLDSMITH.

I HAVE confessed that I like to feel the heart, the humanity, of an author. How natural, then, if I desire to know something about his home-life, his family, his manner of living, his favourite means of recreation. Surely such curiosity is free from censure. Of what stuff are the fine gentlemen made who tell us that we have no business with the private affairs of our great writers? Does not our curiosity spring from respect, from admiration—from *love*? Am I to be blamed if I desired to know how the affairs of this world went with the writer who has charmed and instructed me, who has led me into new worlds of thought and feeling? If I have learned to love an author through his books, may I not be permitted to ask whether he was happily situated? We speak glibly enough of the 'friendship of books,' and what, pray, does that mean but the friendship of *authors*? I have still

to learn that it is no part of a man's duty to take an interest in the home-life of his friends.

' We are not all hero-worshippers,' says Alexander Smith, ' but most of us are so to a large extent. A large proportion of mankind feel a quite peculiar interest in famous writers. Concerning such men no bit of information is too trifling ; everything helps to make out the mental image we have dimly formed for ourselves. And this kind of interest is heightened by the artistic way in which Time occasionally groups them. We think of the wild geniuses who came up from the Universities to London in the dawn of the English drama. Greene, Nash, Marlowe—our professional men of letters—how they cracked their satirical whips, how pinched they were at times ; how, when they possessed money, they flung it from them as if it was poison ; with what fierce speed they wrote, how they shook the stage.'

Wherefore I say let the fine gentlemen who boast of their superiority to the so-called trivialities of life go their way, whilst I go mine. Let them stand upon their lofty pedestals, whilst I inquire how my favourite authors lived, how they spent their days, how they divided their time, how many hours were given to work and how many to recreation. I have

no fear that such knowledge will lessen my admiration for my heroes. I look up, it is true, with feelings akin to awe at the great men who have influenced me. But I desire at times to have a clearer view, I like to walk round and about them, to peer through the brilliant glow by which they are surrounded, to see the *men*, to feel their humanity, to learn how they met the ‘common daily round.’

And I confess that it matters little to me how I glean the desired information. But for preference give me the records of a trained observer. For how much better to see with the eyes of one whose vision is clear, keen, and penetrating! How good, for instance, to accompany Alexander Smith on a visit to the ‘Mermaid’ in session, and there behold the great ‘Shakespeare’s bland oval face, the light of a smile spread over it, and Ben Jonson’s truculent image, and Beaumont and Fletcher sitting together in their beautiful friendship!’ And how good to think that we may go in the company of the same gracious guide, to the famous Literary Club, and there find Burke and Johnson and Garrick and Goldsmith. ‘The Doctor has been talking there for a hundred years, and there will talk for many a hundred more.’ And then, so highly are we favoured, we may go (and who would not?) to

Charles Lamb's snug little room in Inner Temple Lane, and there find 'the hush of a whist-table in one corner, the host stuttering puns as he deals the cards, and sitting about; Hunt, whose every sentence is flavoured with the hawthorn and the primrose, and Hazlitt maddened by Waterloo and St. Helena, and Goodwin with his wild theories, and Kemble with his Roman look. And before the morning comes, and Lamb stutters yet more thickly—for there is a slight flavour of punch in the apartment—what talk there has been of Hogarth's prints, of Izaak Walton, of the old dramatists, of Sir Thomas Browne's *Urn Burial*, with Elia's quaint humour breaking through every interstice, and flowing in every fissure and cranny of the conversation.'

Ah, yes ! it is good to have such glimpses as these, to find the authors who have charmed and instructed us free from the 'fetters of the pen'—their own good or bad, sweet or petulant, always brilliant selves. And how true it is that such glimpses lend peculiar interest to written words ! The book-lovers who like to feel the humanity of an author must surely form a vast and ever-increasing company.

You know how it fares with the superior individual who bears himself as though unmoved by feelings

common to the average mortal. He does not inspire friendship, or admiration, or, for that matter, any feeling worth the having. Knowing the frailty of human nature, we suspect him of playing a double part. And so it is, surely, with the author who addresses us in the manner of one who is a stranger to the feelings that mould this mortal clay. We know better. We know full well that ‘the writer is not continually dwelling amongst the roses and lilies of life ; he is not continually uttering generous sentiments and saying fine things. On him, as on his brethren, the world presses with prosaic needs. He has to make love, and marry, and run the usual matrimonial risks. The income-tax collector visits him as well as others. Around his head at Christmas drives a snow-storm of bills.’ Outside of his books he is pretty much the same as other men. And so, I say, we have greater sympathy with an author if he takes us into his confidence, allows us to bear a part of his burdens—to feel that he, too, is subject to human trials and difficulties.

It is interesting to note that authors themselves are of the same way of thinking. They, too, like to get at the hearts of men. Speaking of a visit paid to Coleridge at Highgate, Emerson complained

that he was in his company for about an hour, but found it impossible to recall the largest part of his discourse, which was often like so many printed paragraphs in his books—perhaps the same—so readily did the great Coleridge fall into certain commonplaces. . . . ‘The visit was rather a spectacle than a conversation.’

And so, you see, we who desire at times to meet authors outside their books are in good company. And if we are not so fortunate as to play Boswell’s part, if we cannot sit at the feet of our heroes, if we cannot mourn or make merry in their company, we can, at least, approach them through the medium of a printed page. And that, I hold, is as good a way as any other—if not the best. Few are the books so deep in human interest as biographies of men of letters. This, it is said, arises from the pictures of comparative defeat which, in almost every instance, such books contain. ‘We see failure more or less—seldom clear, victorious effort. Like the Old Guard at Waterloo, they are fighting bravely on a lost field. In literary biography there is always an element of tragedy, and the love we bear the dead is mingled with pity.’

V

BOOKS THAT CAPTIVATE

V

BOOKS THAT CAPTIVATE

If thought unlock her mysteries,
If friendship on me smile,
I walk in marble galleries,
I talk with kings the while.

EMERSON.

THE world of books is full of friendly voices. Where is the book-lover who has not at times felt like a sulky guest in genial, well-disposed company? Many authors who await our attentions have no other desire than to entertain, to please, to delight, 'All authors are not preachers.' I confess, however, that for my part I like to be 'preached at.' But my preacher must be of the gentle, captivating type—one who employs the beckoning finger. I am willing enough to be led, but immediately adopt a proverbial stubbornness at the touch of a rod. This reminds me of a certain book-lover who declares that he is only influenced by authors who preach from his own pulpit. That is his way of saying that the authors who captivate him are the authors who touch a responsive chord in his nature, who view affairs from his standpoint.

How greatly tastes differ ! I know of many persons, book-lovers of a kind, who must have what they are pleased to call original books. But where, I ask, are such books to be found ? Is it not true that there is no such thing as original thought ? A writer expresses his views with regard to this, that, or the other subject, only to find that the same observations have been made before, or were made at the same moment by some other person in some other quarter of the globe. ‘ Ideas march along in extended order. They are not isolated discoveries made by specially brilliant individuals. Their influence is in the air. It is felt by numbers of thinkers at the same time. Often it is by no means the greatest of them who first announces that he has felt it.’

Thus we come to see that style is the immortal thing in literature. The style that echoes a charming personality is ever fresh. Who can deny that many an author has earned popularity by expressing in a winsome manner thoughts that are common to every thinking mind ? I confess that I, as in the case of many others, am not so anxious to come across fresh and startling views as I am to find writers who bring fresh light to bear upon the old problems. I would rather dwell upon the descriptive passages

quoted elsewhere in these pages than keep company with a mental acrobat. Too often one finds that the so-termed original author is a mere trickster, who does not hesitate to employ any means that promise to produce a startling effect. I am of the same opinion as the book-lover who declares that ‘any merry-andrew can blow down the wrong end of a trumpet.’

But it does not follow that the style that captivates me will captivate my neighbour. I am for a ‘mellow style’ in letters, for delicate phrasing—the polite manner. My neighbour may prefer ‘the style that has a sting in it.’ I am acquainted with a book-lover who confesses that he has no objection to being driven by an author. He likes to feel that an author has a firm hand upon the reins, and will use a whip if the need arises. Gentle, conciliatory authors bore this friend of mine. Others are for whimsical authors; others again are for writers who ‘play’ with their readers’ emotions, now drawing forth tears, now causing laughter. A few are for grave and solemn teachers. Many are for the authors whose only ambition is to entertain. There is no limit to the world’s requirements. But, happily, ‘of the making of books there is no end.’ We need have no fear of the supply running short,

or of our own peculiar needs going unsupplied. ‘Books,’ says Langford, ‘are always with us, and always ready to respond to our wants.’ ‘As you grow ready for it,’ adds another, ‘somehow or other you will find what is needful for you in a book.’

A wise man will select his book with the utmost care. ‘He will not wish to class them all under the sacred name of friends.’ For my own part, I confess that I like to turn at times to authors of ‘humbler sorts.’ I like to dip into the volumes which booksellers label ‘Remainders.’ How frequently one finds in such books the very features that captivate—the style and matter that immediately touch a responsive chord in one’s temperament! Many a book labelled ‘Remainder’ deserves our warmest gratitude. ‘Learning,’ says Fuller, ‘has gained most by those books by which the printers have lost.’

But it must not be supposed that I crave for ‘new’ books. I beg leave to be of the same opinion as Lowell, who says in his *Fables for Critics*: ‘Reading new books is like eating new bread. One can bear it at first, but by gradual steps he is brought to death’s door of a mental dyspepsy.’

The truth is, no hard-and-fast rule can be set down with regard to the books that captivate.

But it is, I fancy, pretty safe to affirm that the books that please us most are the books that reflect our own thoughts and feelings. There has been a 'run' of late upon authors who are wise enough to recognize that the majority of persons are more or less simple and unaffected at heart, nursing their pet aspiration as a child nurses a beloved toy. For my own part, I desire to retain a certain youthfulness of heart and mind. I am, therefore, willing enough to confess that the books that captivated me in early life are the books that captivate me still. We 'grown-ups' make a brave outward show, but at the back of it there is still the old craving for a friendly hand, a kindly word, a sympathetic friend.

And when it comes to the question of fiction, I confess that my own liking is for books that introduce pleasing characters. I have no desire to meet again in novels the type of individual who glares at me from the 'police columns' of the daily press. Murderers, thieves, and adulterers are not to my mind less unpleasant because they happened to occupy a 'romantic platform.' Give me, I pray, congenial company. And if, as some declare, we must needs have all types represented, then let the artist who draws them employ the touch that convinces and yet spares. I do not desire to see black

laid upon black. To dwell unduly in fiction upon sin and sinners is neither instructive nor entertaining, and it is, as inferred, a poor sort of artist whose pictures are all shade.

I beg leave to be of the company of book-lovers who prefer a pleasant flavour to their fiction, and, happily, we are well supplied. ‘Bookland’ is rich in winsome personalities, both as regards authors and their creations. When we speak of the books that captivate, how often we have in mind the charming persons who in the working out of this, that, or the other story played so noble and inspiring a part !

VI

PERSONALITIES IN 'BOOKLAND'

VI

PERSONALITIES IN ‘BOOKLAND’

Give me leave
To enjoy myself; that place that does contain
My books, the best companions, is to me
A glorious court, where hourly I converse
With the old sages and philosophers;
And sometimes for variety, I confer
With kings and emperors, and weigh their counsels.

BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

It is good to think of the many captivating personalities one has met on one’s rambles through ‘Bookland’—to greet again with extended hands the genial Vicar immortalized by Goldsmith, to ponder in one’s mind his godly charity, to listen enthralled to his delicate and gracious observations. It is good, I say, to set forth on a ‘mental pilgrimage’ to the homes of the entertaining folk who were first made known to us through those ‘little sheets of paper,’ and who are ever ready to ‘amuse us, teach us, comfort us, open their hearts to us as brothers.’

One may select one’s own company, and may, as

the mood takes one, be learned or flippant, grave or gay. One may visit the famous Vicarage, or, in another mood and with another end in view, go in the enchanting company of Goldsmith to the home of Beau Tibbs, there to laugh at poor Tibbs' foibles, to learn from his old Scotch servant that his good lady is away washing his 'twa shirts' at the next door, because they have taken an oath against lending their tub out any longer. But eventually the good lady presents herself, making 'twenty apologies' for the carelessness of her attire, and explaining in a grand manner that she had stayed the night at Vauxhall Gardens with a certain countess.

We are invited to dinner, something elegant being suggested by Mr. Tibbs—a turbot or an ortolan. Whereupon Mrs. Tibbs cries, 'What do you think, my dear, of a nice pretty bit of ox-cheek, piping hot, and dressed with a little of my own sauce?' 'The very thing!' cries Mr. Tibbs. 'I hate your immense loads of meat; that is country all over; extreme disgusting to those who are in the least acquainted with high life.' But we do not remain for the dainty morsel. For, as our guide whispers, 'the company of fools may at first make us smile, but at last never fails of rendering us melancholy.'

And so we take our leave, assured by Beau Tibbs that had we remained, dinner would have been ready in less than two hours.

And thus one may journey from house to house, from street to street, from county to county, and from country to country, to wellnigh any spot between the two Poles, there to find some old friend or other whom one has met in Bookland. And how varied is the company, how representative, how cosmopolitan, how sure one may be of finding just the very persons one wishes to meet ! The child, still in the 'Age of Innocence,' looking for a playmate, may find one in Bookland. The youth whose blood runs hot and strong, and who desires a companion who can speak of mighty enterprises, may make his choice. The young woman who desires lessons in deportment and manners will find many good souls waiting to instruct her. And what company, what models of virtue and loveliness, await the young man whose 'fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love' !

Yes, in Bookland there are persons to suit all ages, and all types, and all moods. Can we who have read with delight from our childhood days onward ever forget our dear old friends ? Can we forget the characters, some simple, sweet, and

charming, others strange, wild, grotesque, with whom we became acquainted in our nursery days? Can we forget Alice and her adventures in Wonderland, or the army of whimsical beings found in books of the same alluring order? Do they not still influence us and guide our morals?

And what of the book-born acquaintances of our youth? Is it not true that 'the books that charmed us in youth recall the delight ever afterwards'? What a time for reading is that period when the blood runs warm and strong, and the mind is vigorous—one's whole nature keen and impressionable! Ah! youth is the time to meet a maiden in a book, to feel—just as the author, no doubt, felt himself—that she is wonderfully fair to look upon, charming alike in manners, voice, and looks. One may venture to suspect that many a young man has lost his heart to the maidens who flit so gracefully through the pages of books.

The young women of Bookland are not, however, all of fairy-like type. Who can forget the many whose goodness of heart surpass their bewitching looks—heroic women, true as steel, and faithful unto death? Ideals must surely have been formed by readers from such as these, and their like sought no doubt in real life. And one may go further and

venture to hope that they have been found and have given their hearts to noble seekers, and lived with them, as the story-books say, 'happily ever after.'

Then what of the more staid, and, it may be, more serious, period in life? We are, let us say, now beginning to settle down, to feel a sense of responsibility. Father Time with his scythe has not greatly concerned us up to now; but we fancy that we see his figure, faint and shadowy, and, it may be, only just discernible, coming towards us from over the horizon. . . . We are ready for serious books now.

But, bless you! that is just a stage—a period in our pilgrimage through life. The old loves return. The volumes that charmed us in childhood and in youth again claim our affections. And with what zest we re-read those precious volumes! How heartily we greet our dear old friends! How grateful we are to the authors who have introduced us to this or that genial fellow, to this sedate and scholarly gentleman, to this winsome maid, to that noble man, to this gracious lady! And how many more await us!

Yes, the persons one meets in Bookland form an ever-increasing army—so vast, so numerous, that when meditating upon them and their characteristics,

their virtues, their weaknesses, their foibles, their whimsicalities, their sins, and their noble deeds, one is led to divide them into classes and place them under the names of their creators—to set apart the delicately but firmly pictured characters of Jane Austen in a line running parallel with, say, the creations of Mrs. Gaskell and other lady novelists, taking care to keep them some little distance apart from the creations of Fielding and Sterne. For in Bookland, as in real life, it is unreasonable to expect persons of widely different temperaments to live on amicable terms.

That was a good plan, surely, of the book-lover who not only classified the characters of his favourite authors under the name of their creators, but also, after carefully considering their various characteristics, grouped them in little compartments. It is good, however, to feel that the characters of many of our famous novelists may be left to mix freely. One cannot, for example, doubt that the great majority of the creations of Charles Dickens were meant to 'rub shoulders.' So wide were the sympathies of that great delineator of human life that few indeed are the children of his imagination who are lacking in some point or other of common interest. Tapley, Pinch, Micawber, Toots, and the

lovable Pickwick, and a host besides, may be left safely in one compartment.

But all this may lead you to suppose that the persons who played a part in real life as well as in Bookland are being forgotten. That can never be. For who can forget the chief characters in the historical works of our great novelists? These, in a sense, are more real to us than children of the imagination. For we may first study the conditions in which this or that great figure played a part in life, and then look upon them in the searching light of the skilful novelist.

How natural, however, if the lover of books should at times overlook the greatest of figures in a company so vast! He will do well if he but keeps a warm corner or two in his heart for old friends and an open place for new ones. And if meanwhile he can manage to keep his mind fresh and active, ready to receive new ideas and eager for fresh knowledge, he may surely rest content. Happily for the makers of books we have not all the same taste. Some are for this class of book; others for that. Some seek knowledge; others seek entertainment.

But I am running away from the vein in which this little book was started. I am forgetting to set forth

my own little likes and dislikes. There is a reason, however, and it is this: I have nothing more exciting to confess at this point than the plain fact that I am of the company of bookmen who read *simply for the love of it.*

VII

SECOND-HAND BOOKS

VII

SECOND-HAND BOOKS

The love of books is a love which requires neither justification, apology, nor defence.—*LANGFORD.*

I HAVE confessed that I am of the company of book-lovers who delight in dipping into the ‘lucky-tubs’ to be found outside booksellers’ windows. I know of no pleasanter way of spending a spare half-hour. Give me a few ‘loose’ coppers, place my feet upon a likely road, and I am content. I am now, let me say, of the happy company of *book-fishermen*. And this, mark you, is fishing in real earnest, this effort to ‘hook’ good food for the mind, to place in one’s basket a ‘book that delighteth and giveth perennial satisfaction.’

Ah! it is a good road I am on—one of London’s happiest thoroughfares—a road rich in book-shops. Here for a humble penny one may dip into tub or barrel and perchance pick out a volume worth its weight in gold! We hear so frequently of marvellous ‘catches.’ You know how this, that, or the other fine sportsman boasts of landing fish of

amazing weight—well, it is so with your *book-fisherman*. Has he not told you of first editions procured for a single copper? And who shall say what fine day may not find us among Fortune's favoured ones?

And so now to our fishing! Here is a copy of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, 'hooked' in the deep waters of a 'penny tub.' It is calf-bound, mark you, and in fairish condition, though much stained with the passing of years. My heart leaps; it is very old—a first edition possibly! But no; it is anything but that, and alas! like the egg that has grown into a proverb, it is only good in parts. Many of the pages are entirely missing, and others partially so. Judged by the books that surround me, it is dear at a penny . . . *Paradise Lost!*

Yes, I confess that this fishing has its distressing side. One is frequently disappointed. And how heart-rending it is to find great works in a soiled and tattered condition, to discover, on drawing one's hand from some 'lucky-tub,' that one holds the remains, a few pages, it may be, or the cover only, of a book that has played a part in the making of this world's history! And how touching to find a winsome companion like the gentle Elia soiled, torn, bereft of covering, showing yellow gum and coarse stitching! I confess that such a sight almost moves me to tears.

Fair wear and tear would never have reduced the gentle Elia to so pitiable a state. I suspect hands as callous as those of the butcher in the slaughter-house across the way. Alas ! that there should be men to whom books are merely so much paper and cloth. ‘ A book,’ you tell them, ‘ is the precious life-blood of a master-spirit, embalmed and treasured upon purpose, to a life beyond.’ And their answer is a smile. But this is no time for repining. The great army of book-lovers swells with each passing year. From all sides come recruits, often from the most unexpected quarters, from mill and factory, mean street and slum. Yes ; ‘ tis a great day for books, and soon *Everyman* will have his library, in fact as well as in name. And who dare say, who can guess, what treasures his library will hold ?

Now back to our fishing. Here is a tub that promises well ; the price per volume, as aforetime, is only one penny. See ! Here is a dainty volume, slim and shapely of form, and clothed in a delicate green. A minor poet, you guess. Yes ; the work of a minor poet, published, no doubt, at the author’s own expense. But do not turn aside. Do not say that such books are of no value. I confess that I am for lingering over this slender booklet. Its cover is very pleasing ; the type is large and clear ; the

paper is of good texture. And what anxiety, what patient care, probably went to the making of its contents ! Brave minor poet ! You have withstood many rebuffs. The road you travel holds, I doubt not, many pure delights : you walk, it may be, beneath a star-strewn sky. But star-gazing has proved in your case a dangerous occupation. ‘ He who raises his eyes to the heavens forgets the stones and puddles at his feet.’ Alas ! you have had many falls. And when perchance you have come to the ground, it has often been to the accompaniment of heartless laughter. ‘ Here,’ cry the critics, ‘ is another minor poet on all fours.’ And with ill-timed jests they proceed to point out your weaknesses ; how that you have not the feet to walk aright, much less run ; and as for wings, there is not, ’tis frequently said, so much as a sign of their sprouting. But for all that you have scrambled to your feet, and marching bravely forward, continued to give generously of your gentle fancy. Long may you live ! In you we have (and here is my strongest point in your favour) many a great and worthy poet in the bud.

And so I confess gladly, and, indeed, with a proud heart, that in my bookshelves you hold a warm, well-sheltered corner. I love to handle your slender

volumes, to pore over your early fancies, ill-expressed at times, it may be, but with a sincerity that is refreshing, and a simplicity that is delightful. And if your work is poor from cover to cover—which is rarely, if ever the case—well, you have given us a book.

Yes, I am of the company of book-lovers who revere anything in the form of a book. Lovers are made that way ; and it is futile to inquire how I can bring myself to love books of ‘ all sorts and conditions.’ As well might you ask the nature-lover why he speaks so tenderly of, say, the worm that peeps through the tender green of some sun-lit lawn. ’Tis simply love—love for the humblest children of dear Mother Earth. And so it is with the true book-lover ; for the humblest volume he has a tender thought.

But what of our fishing ? This is, I take it, a fitting place to record how on such and such a day I had the good fortune to ‘ hook ’ a copy of this or that desirable work for a few humble pence—a ‘ mere song ’ ! Well, so it has been, ‘ day in and day out.’ But those books, I would remind you, are now my companions, my friends, and I can no more associate money with their value than I can judge a friend in the flesh by the contents of his purse. To me they are *priceless*.

VIII

' THE CULT OF THE BOOKPLATE '



VIII

'THE CULT OF THE BOOKPLATE'

You have often heard the cry, and know full well its meaning, 'My books are priceless.' What wonder, then, if you and I—lovers of books—take lively interest in what an ingenuous man of business has called '*The Cult of the Bookplate.*' 'The mission of the bookplate,' he advises us, 'has always been, and must always be, primarily to indicate ownership of the books in which they are placed. They may be ornate or simple, as the taste or means of the owner may indicate ; they may incorporate crests, arms, motto, or other family attribute ; or, again, they may reflect the personal interests or occupations of the owner ; but the real aim of the bookplate remains ever the same—a reminder to those who borrow.'

Pretty ground this for contemplation—for doubts, counsels, hopes, fears, regrets ; aye, and for *rejoicing* ! How my mind leaps, first this way, then that, when I meditate upon that rich circle of friendship in which I may borrow from a fellow book-lover's

treasured volumes, and, of course, lend of my own ! Yet by what unspeakable regrets am I possessed when I think of certain treasured volumes lent in wildly generous moments to good but ‘short-minded’ friends ! I have in mind a little volume of essays—a first and only edition—by an unknown but charming writer, which is now in the possession of that restless fellow K——. May he see these words and repent ! And what of that treasured edition—once mine, but, alas ! mine no more—of certain writings of Dr. Johnson ? Oh, that I could send the good doctor in quest of the volume ! What blushes of shame he would bring to the cheeks of the heartless borrower ! ‘Sir !’ he would cry. And what words would follow ! Very speedily should I be in a position to fill the gap in my shelves.

And there is that dainty little calf-bound volume of Lamb’s essays, borrowed some months back by J——. Where are you and my little volume now, good friend ? For reasons known to ourselves alone I address you tenderly. But I would that I could send the gentle Elia to recover my lost gem. Very gently would he deal with you, with quaint phrases, puns, and happy jests. Aye, and with little speeches uttered with that fascinating lisp of his. Indeed, I

fear, now that I come to give the matter careful thought, that he would leave you empty handed. It would be so like his charming ways to console, comfort, and amuse you, and leave with you, after all, my volume of his incomparable essays.

The truth is, this work of restoring borrowed volumes to one’s shelves calls for a stout heart. I confess that I am wanting in the necessary qualifications. I have not the courage to speak harshly to a fellow book-lover. So firm is his hold on my affections that I am as wax in his hands. Yet book-lovers to a man agree that the borrower who never repays stands in dire need of correction. I must call another to the task—one of stronger metal.

Listen ! ‘Even the fieldmouse,’ cries my champion, ‘has a russet gown to match the mould, but the book-lover who has let loose a borrower in his library is as forlorn as the goat tied up for tiger’s bait. True, that to spare your Homer you may plead you are re-acquainting yourself with the *Iliad*, but that is to save Homer and lose Virgil. You cannot profess that you study all the classics simultaneously ; and who knows that better than the borrower ? Snatch your Browning from his grip, and his talons sink into Goethe instead. What does it matter to him ? He is out for books, and he

will not be placated until he has left gaping rents in your shelves, like the hull of a bombarded battleship. These chasms shall burden your soul with the weight of many unkindly maledictions, but the borrower will return no evil thought, for the simple and satisfactory reason that he will now think no more either of you or of your books. Stabled securely upon his shelves, they will remain on one of those perpetual leases that amount to a freehold. It is useless to invade his lair with the hope of bringing back the spoil. Are you not instructed that he has not yet had time to read them, but that they are yours again whenever you will? Outgeneralled and outflanked, you retreat empty-handed.

‘ Books are gentle, lovable company. Why should the lust of them corrupt human nature, turning an amiable citizen into that hopeless irreclaimable, the inveterate book-borrower? Is it that law of contrasts which associates with the noble steed the ignoble horse-coper, and with the gentle dove the cropped head and unshaven jowl of the pigeon-flyer? But truce to theories! It is the hour of action. Will not a benignly reforming Government insist that lent books shall be registered like bills of sale, and a list drawn up of notorious

borrowers, with compulsory inspection of their dens, to protect our defenceless libraries from the ravages of the book-pirate? If it is hopeless to look for his cure, shall we not at least petition for his prevention?’

You will allow that all this bears directly upon the subject in mind. Does not the ingenuous gentleman whom I have quoted at the head of this chapter aver that the real aim of the bookplate remains ever the same—‘a reminder to those who borrow.’ Here, then, is one thread of hope, but only a very thin thread, I fear. Not for one moment dare I venture to think that it will bear the weight of our grievances. It is too fine, too delicate, to save us from the hands of the ruthless borrower. Indeed, I suspect that if it in any wise alters our position, it is only to draw us into fresh danger. For you know how many and how varied are the charms of book-plates, both old and new. Indeed, I have known book-lovers borrow a volume for the sole purpose of tracing the design upon the fly-leaf. It is a fault of which the present writer is guilty. With shame he confesses it.

But wait! Why should I speak with blushes of my admiration for the brave armorial designs which adorn the calf-bound volumes of my friend H——?

Well may he be proud of his family attributes, and well may I admire the manner in which some skilful designer, long departed, has incorporated arms and family motto with the familiar words *Ex Libris*. I know not, by the way, how any book-lover can bring himself to ignore information so absolutely clear. The announcement 'FROM MY LIBRARY' seems in the case of the particular book-plate in mind to come, nay, *does* come, from a trumpet of amazing dimensions. But it is to be feared that the imaginative designer has been allowed too free a hand. So rich is his fancy, so skilful his line work, that the force of his call to duty is dulled by admiration. Perhaps that is why my friend's volume still rests on my shelves. And perchance herein may rest an explanation of the heartless manner in which my friend has held fast to my treasured volume of Cowper's poems.

It is, I say, to be feared that designers of book-plates have sacrificed the primary aim of their calling to the elaboration of playful fancies. From the very birth of the bookplate the fault seems to have been present. I am told that the earliest specimens date back to 1516, and on the Continent, notably in Germany, even earlier than that. Far back into the ages must we travel to find the first

offenders. Let the interested book-lover examine the ancient examples presented in 1574 by Sir Nicholas Bacon to the University of Cambridge. He will then see pretty clearly how the war has been waged between the pictorial and the practical, and how, all along the line, the victory has been with the former. And what wonder with such mighty craftsmen as Albrecht Durer, Lucas Cranach, and Hans Holbein to wield the steel point of the engraver! Can one be surprised if such men defeat the chief aim of the bookplate, and put to silence with their wonderful skill the simple cry *Ex Libris*? Bookplates by Durer, Cranach, or Holbein must surely give great value to the volumes in which they rest. Note the danger! True book-lovers will blush to own it, but we must acknowledge the fact that a bookplate may have greater attractions than the volume in which it rests!

Wherefore, I say, we book-lovers will be well advised if we see to it that we do not fall into the error of keeping on our shelves books which may be coveted for the plates they contain. Bookplates in the delicate manner of Chippendale, with 'wreath and ribbon' and open shell work, are too alluring. Designs in the manner of Sheraton are also dangerously attractive. Jacobean plates come nearer the

desired mark. But to my mind the good old English style of plate, 'simple armorial,' is best fitted for the purpose.

Always must we remember that the primary object of the bookplate is *a reminder to those who borrow*. On this score I am disposed to favour those inexpensive modern plates in which are interwoven some dear, familiar scene—a nook or corner of one's garden, or a beloved scene in one's native place. If the ruthless borrower has aught of good in him, surely he will be affected by such tender personal associations! But we have seen that the average borrower of books is a strange fellow. Alas! I know him only too well. Indeed, I too must confess that 'out of an intimate knowledge of my own sinful ways have I spoken.'

IX

BEDSIDE BOOKS

IX

BEDSIDE BOOKS

I COME to my subject in a sleepy mood. It seems a daring confession to make. But you will allow that only when one's mind is bent on thoughts of sleep can one hope to speak fittingly of bedside books. 'Tis a subject calling for gentle, quiet thoughts. And what better state of mind? You remember Robert Louis Stevenson's prayer, 'Give us the quiet mind.' How often has a similar prayer been offered! Too often are we disturbed in thought—harassed, perplexed, worried. Let us now turn our attention to books that soothe and lull to rest. Here they stand, ready to hand. But name them I dare not, save in my own heart. For your taste in this matter may be totally different from mine. I dare only say at this point—for here surely I may speak with confidence—that no bedside shelf is complete without a copy of Stevenson's prayers. With gratitude I confess that of the many volumes which have comforted me during dark hours not one

is so dear, so close to my heart, as the little volume bearing the golden letters R. L. S.

'Be with our friends, be with ourselves. Go with each of us to rest. If any awake, temper to them the dark hours of watching; and when the day returns, return to us our sun and comforter, and call us up with morning faces and with morning hearts—eager to labour: eager to be happy, if happiness be our portion; and if the day be marked for sorrow, strong to endure it.' Certainly the prayers of R. L. S. should have a place on every bedside shelf. That you are familiar with the foregoing prayer, I cannot doubt. 'Many are the golden passages the lover of good books has by heart.' It may be that you have upon your own particular bedside shelf many 'devotional authors' with whose every word you are familiar—books, small and great, which are as jewels in your shelf. And no doubt you have upon the same shelf many every-day and every-hour books, acting, as it were, as a setting to your gems. For certainly the bedside shelf, if it is to be complete, must contain books to suit all moods. One cannot be certain in what mood the night watches will find one. The over-excited brain, for instance, needs its own particular medicine, and sometimes two, three, or more drugs are required, according

to the state and nature of the patient. In the majority of cases it is futile to attempt a cure with a book less lively than the patient's own brain. His abnormal condition must be righted by degrees. One book, or drug, must follow another, till his mind has been restored to a normal state. Then may he resort to his accustomed 'rest books,' and so fall asleep.

But I fear that such talk 'smacks' of the doctor and his medicine chest, and I desire to conjure up restful thoughts. Well may the reader be forgiven if he starts up in protest. Indeed, here is the difficulty and the danger of seeking to promote a restful condition. One is so apt to make, with the best intentions possible, a remark which has the reverse effect. There is, I say, the risk of naming a book which to the reader might come as a call to action—to daring deeds and mighty enterprises—a mood as far removed from slumber as the North Pole from the South.

I may, however, speak freely enough in the company of book-lovers who wake with the rising sun and take to themselves one of their beloved books. They will not resent my likes and dislikes—they who open the day with a 'jolly good book.' In their company I may confess that for the early morning I prefer a book with plenty of 'go' in it.

Give me life and spirit and enterprise. Thus may I hope to retain some measure of the buoyancy of youth. It is good to have been young in youth, and, as the years go, to grow *younger*. ‘Many,’ it is written, ‘are already old before they are through their teens; but to travel deliberately through one’s ages is to get the heart out of a liberal education. Times change, opinions vary to their opposite, and still the world appears a brave gymnasium, full of sea-bathing, and horse exercise, and bracing, manly virtues; and what can be more encouraging than to find the friend who was welcome at one age welcome at another?’

Let *Westward Ho!* stand on your bedside shelf, and many other books of the same brave and lively order—‘the travel and adventure books of our spirited youth.’ These, if you meet fresh days with a book, will brace you for the battle. Stevenson must, of course, remain one of your companions—your faithful friend both night and morning. Bravery he will give you, and grace also.

Forth from the casement, on the plain
Where honour has the world to gain,
Pour forth and bravely do your part,
O knights of the unshielded heart!
Forth and for ever forward!—out
From prudent turret and redoubt,

And in the mellay charge amain
To fall, but yet to rise again !
Captive ? Ah, still, to honour bright,
A captive soldier of the right !
Or free and fighting, good with ill ?
Unconquering but unconquered still !

And mark again with what ‘manly grace’ and beauty of expression Stevenson turns our thoughts to the ‘Giver of all strength.’

‘ Give us grace and strength to bear and to persevere. Offenders, give us the grace to accept and to forgive offenders. Forgetful ourselves, help us to bear cheerfully the forgetfulness of others. Give us courage and gaiety and the quiet mind. Spare us to our friends, soften us to our enemies. Bless us, if it may be, in all our innocent endeavours. If it may not, give us the strength to encounter that which is to come, that we be brave in peril, constant in tribulation, temperate in wrath, and in all changes of fortune, and down to the gates of death, loyal and loving one to another.’

If there is a more helpful bedside author than Stevenson, I should much like to make his acquaintance. To few is it given to speak ‘the word that cheers’ with such a fine combination of tenderness and courage.

‘ It is a commonplace,’ he says, ‘ that we cannot answer for ourselves before we have been tried.

But it is not so common a reflection, and surely more consoling, that we usually find ourselves a great deal braver and better than we thought. I believe this is every one's experience ; but an apprehension that they may belie themselves in the future prevents mankind from trumpeting this cheerful sentiment abroad. I wish sincerely, for it would have saved me much trouble, there had been some one to put me in a good heart about life when I was younger ; to tell me how dangers are most portentous on a distant sight ; and how the good in a man's spirit will not suffer itself to be overlaid, and rarely or never deserts him in the hour of need.'

To the troubled, relaxed mind such words come as a bracing tonic. Too often have we passed sleepless hours for the want of a word in season—something to put a little ' grit ' into us for the duties of the morrow. Where the average mortal is concerned Stevenson certainly supplies that need. Should he by any chance fail—well, there is an essayist of our own day, waiting to minister to the most exacting needs. I have in mind the many beautiful and tender pages written by one whom we associate with a certain college window. Certainly of him it may be said that he seeks to comfort and console, and to soothe and lull to rest.

X

OLD FRIENDS

G

X

OLD FRIENDS

Come, and take choice of my library,
And so beguile thy sorrow.

GOLDSMITH.

Now let us dwell upon our every-day and every-hour books—our dear old familiar friends. ‘On a shelf in my bookcase,’ says Alexander Smith, ‘are collected a number of volumes which look somewhat the worse for wear. Those of them that originally possessed gilding have had it fingered off, each of them has leaves turned down, and they open of themselves in places wherein I have been happy, and with whose every word I am familiar as with the furniture of the room in which I nightly slumber ; each of them has remarks relevant and irrelevant scribbled on their margins. Those favourite volumes cannot be called peculiar glories of literature ; but out of the world of books I have singled them, as I have singled my intimates out of the world of men.’

Ah ! that makes pleasant reading. For do not the sentiments expressed reflect our own feelings ?

And do they not place us in gracious and distinguished company? In his charming way, Goldsmith whispers, ‘The first time I read an excellent book, it is to me as if I had gained a new friend. When I read over a book I have perused before, it resembles the meeting with an old one.’ And to this Dillon adds, ‘Choose an author as you would choose a friend’; whilst Langford, touching the same theme, declares that ‘a wise man will select his book with care, for he will not wish to class them all under the sacred name of friends.’

And as friendship has its roots deep set in love and sympathy, and is for ‘serene days and country rambles, and also for rough roads and hard fare, shipwreck, poverty, and persecution, and, moreover, keeps company with the sallies of the wit,’ it is easy enough to understand why such authors as Charles Lamb, Oliver Goldsmith, William Hazlitt, Leigh Hunt, Richard Jefferies, Thomas De Quincey, Joseph Addison, and, of later years, Robert Louis Stevenson, have our affections.

Here they stand—Lamb, Goldsmith, Hazlitt, Hunt, Jefferies—the whole lovable company. What shall I say concerning these friends of ours? I am moved by deep and serious feelings. But, according to his own telling, the gentle Elia, the first in mind,

'had a general aversion from being treated like a grave or respectable character, and kept a wary eye upon the advances of age that should so entitle him. He herded always, while it was possible, with people younger than himself. He did not conform to the march of time, but was dragged along in the procession. His manners lagged behind his years. He was too much of the boy man. The *toga virilis* never sate gracefully on his shoulders. The impressions of infancy had burnt into him, and he resented the impertinence of manhood.' And therein, surely, rests the secret of his charm. In spite of his brave confessions, how firm to discerning hearts is the bed of the stream over which his thoughts flow ! Who can doubt the source of a stream that flows so sweetly ?

And what of Oliver Goldsmith—poor 'Goldy,' as he was called by his circle of intimates on earth ? He, too, was very human, and, indeed, had many weaknesses. And they tell us—they who write of such matters with authority—that his days of poverty and wretchedness were largely, if not entirely, the outcome of his follies. Even in the sphere in which he shines—a clear, bright, inextinguishable star—it is said that he had many shortcomings. 'He had neither the gift of knowledge nor

the power of research. As an essayist and poet, he has neither extended views nor originality ; as a critic, upon the few occasions upon which he embarks on criticism his sympathies are of the most restricted kind.' And yet for the warmth and gentleness of his heart and the purity of his style we love him. ' His playful and delicate style transformed everything he touched into something radiant with warmth and fragrant with a perfume all its own.'

And how fared it with Hazlitt—the keen critic, the impassioned writer—' unbending and severe, insurgent in his political views'? Are we not told that he was really more of an artist and sentimentalist than a politician? ' As for his life, it was aesthetic, Bohemian, and irregular in the extreme. The restraints of domestic life were intolerable ; he wanted to be alone to write ; rough accommodation and coarse fare appeased him best ; *tinkerdom* was the ordinary state of his interior environment ; save for two pictures (which served as a link with past aspiration and were treasured accordingly), he had no property ; a fugitive amour seemed to furnish the emotional side of him with the stimulant it most required ; he was a night rambler and a reveller in Rousseau, over whose *Héloïse* and *Confessions* he expended literally pints of tears.' Such was the

temperament of the writer, artist, and sentimentalist who gave us those incomparable essays ‘On Going a Journey,’ ‘On the Ignorance of the Learned,’ and ‘On Familiar Style.’

And what of those other old friends, Hunt, Jefferies, De Quincey, Robert Louis Stevenson? But our inquiries have gone far enough. What boots it to repeat that our friends were human in life, just as surely as they are human in their books, but with a humanity that allures, charms, captivates? They do not preach to us, these old friends of ours, or make open claims to virtue; and yet we are never so conscious of goodness as when they are near. Their lightest raillery scorns a mean act. In their company meanness flees as from a pestilence. . . . Our *friends*!

Wisely is it said that the ‘best way to represent to life the manifold use of friendship is to cast and see how many things there are which a wise man cannot do himself; and then it will appear that it was a sparing speech of the ancients to say, “that a friend is more than himself”: for that a friend is far more than himself.’

And so I thank heaven for my friends, for the wise, the lovely, and the noble-minded who stand side by side, ever willing, ever ready, upon my humble shelf

XI

THROUGH ROSE-COLOURED SPECTACLES

XI

THROUGH ROSE-COLOURED SPECTACLES

Now let another occupy the printed page. I have promised to give the experiences of other book-lovers, to show how books influence their thoughts and ways ; and I am anxious to introduce a short, slim gentleman of sixty odd summers, with a smiling face and an air of wellbeing, a retiring, peaceful book-lover, whom you would never suspect of playing any part in a mystery.

Nevertheless, my friend must plead guilty to practising the ‘art of make-believe’ to such a degree that one could never be certain how much was real concerning him and his affairs and how much was imaginary. Indeed, the only sure and unchanging thing about him was his spectacles and the manner in which he viewed life through them—his *point of view*.

‘My spectacles,’ he told me, over and over again, ‘are rose-coloured. You understand, *rose-coloured*. They and myself are inseparable. Without them I

am as bad as stone-blind, and dare not take a step in any direction.'

Then he would smile in a manner that led one to suspect that he was merely drawing upon his imagination. But I learnt that my friend's life had been lived under such peculiar difficulties, and that he had passed through so much sorrow and affliction, that without his rose-coloured spectacles he was, in *one* sense, stone-blind.

It pleased him to imagine that the lenses in his treasured spectacles, which were gold-rimmed and old-fashioned in shape, had been cut from rose-coloured pebbles, with the power of giving a rosy hue to life, and bringing all things into correct perspective.

'Correct perspective and the right point of view,' he remarked on a certain day, 'are everything in life. My spectacles give me the correct vision. They bring men and affairs into proper focus, and, what is more, they give them a rose tint. Robert Louis Stevenson wore spectacles something like mine, but his were far and away more powerful. They enabled him to see farther and more clearly. They were of a deeper and purer tint.'

He drew from his pocket a small cloth-bound edition of passages from Stevenson's works. The

little volume did not measure more than, say, three by five inches, and was considerably soiled and worn ; but he handled it as though it were worth its weight in precious stones.

It was clear, before he opened the volume, that he knew the greater part of the contents by heart ; for he commenced to quote as he ran his fingers round the edge of the cover :

‘ “ When you have read, you carry away with you a memory of the man himself ; it is as though you had touched a loyal hand, looked into brave eyes, and made a noble friend ; there is another bond on you thenceforward, binding you to life and to the love of virtue.” ’

He accompanied the quotation with a pleasing smile, as who should say, ‘ How true that is and how nobly expressed ! ’ Then he turned the leaves hastily as though looking for a favourite passage ; but he abandoned the search a moment later, and glanced up.

‘ I fancy I can give you the passage correctly. I should like you to hear it. It will throw light upon what I have said about my rose-coloured spectacles.’

He looked up, as he spoke, at the trees overhanging the lane through which we walked.

“Nor does the scenery any more affect the thoughts than the thoughts affect the scenery. We see places through our humours as through differently-coloured glasses.”

He paused a moment, then repeated the last line slowly and with emphasis: ‘*We see places through our humours as through differently-coloured glasses.*’

“We are ourselves,” he continued, “a term in the quotation, a note of the chord, and make discord and harmony almost at will. There is no fear for the result, if we but surrender ourselves sufficiently to the country that surrounds and follows us, so that we are ever thinking suitable thoughts or telling ourselves some suitable sort of story as we go. We become thus, in some sense, a centre of beauty; we are provocative of beauty, such as a gentle and sincere character is provocative of sincerity and gentleness in others. . . .”

Then he told me ‘some suitable sort of story’ about a certain man who built a castle upon dry land, a castle of stone, firm as a rock, and filled it with his heart’s desire. But no sooner had the man taken up his abode therein than the tide of circumstances turned. Misfortune followed misfortune; sorrow followed sorrow; first, the loss

of earthly possessions, then the loss of loved ones. All brightness and hope were taken out of the man's life, and for many years he dwelt in darkness.

At this point my friend turned away, and slowly, thoughtfully, polished his spectacles. One could not help thinking that he was relating in a parable the story of his own past. This suspicion was strengthened, if not actually confirmed, when he readjusted his spectacles and continued :

'Then this same man built a castle in the air partly out of the creations of his own mind, partly out of the creations of others, a castle of thought, a building without visible support. He found, however, that this castle in the air, built on lines he had been taught to smile at in his youth, was more enduring than his castle of stone. Moat and drawbridge were impassable, the gates impregnable. Changed circumstances could not affect it ; misfortune and sorrow could not shake it ; even death left it unmoved.'

' You see,' he continued, ' what I am driving at ? Listen to this from my little volume : " No man can find out the world, says Solomon, from beginning to end, because the world is in his own heart." And this : " An inspiration is a joy for ever, a possession as solid as a landed estate, a fortune we

can never exhaust, and which gives us year by year a revenue of pleasurable activity. To have many of these is to be spiritually rich.”’

The next moment he drew from his pocket a worn leather case and showed me a portrait of Robert Louis Stevenson. He had it wrapped in two layers of paper, both yellow with age and stained from much handling. But the likeness was well preserved, as clear, perhaps, as on the day it was taken.

‘I number this likeness,’ he said, ‘amongst my treasures. They go everywhere with me—this portrait of Stevenson and this little volume of extracts from his works.’ He fingered the cover affectionately. ‘The case,’ he continued, ‘is worn with much handling, but the rose-coloured lenses have not lost their power. Listen to this: “It is in virtue of his own desires and curiosities that any man continues to exist with even patience, that he is charmed by the look of things and people, and that he awakens every morning with a renewed appetite for work and pleasure.” And this: “Noble disappointment, noble self-denial, are not to be admired, not even to be pardoned, if they bring bitterness. It is one thing to enter the kingdom of heaven maim; another to maim yourself and stay outside.”’

He glanced up and handed me the volume. ‘Make your own selection,’ he suggested; ‘read something that condemns me.’

I acted on the suggestion, or, rather, the *first* part of it; for my selection, contrary to his request, was in the form of commendation:

“ His was, indeed, a good influence in life while he was still among us; he had a fresh laugh; it did you good to see him; and, however sad he may have been at heart, he always bore a bold and cheerful countenance, and took fortune’s worst as it were the showers of spring.”

I was not aware how entirely this fitted my friend’s case until some months had passed. Our friendship was only in its infancy at that time, little more than an acquaintance. We had no formal introduction. He had asked the time of day, then gone on to talk of his rose-coloured spectacles. We had much to say concerning his spectacles in the days that followed—always in a light and pleasant vein. To be tedious or heavy was, to his mind, a grievous fault, particularly in books. In life and in letters he would always look for, and never fail to find, the brightest side, the happiest passages. And he would apply the one to the other—a passage from Stevenson, or some other author, to an incident

in his own or some other life—in a manner that was wonderfully illuminating and helpful.

In brief, his was ‘the life that loves, that gives, that loses itself, that overflows ; the warm, hearty, social, helpful life.’ From a sorrowful chapter in his history he would weave a story for the help of others, always from a rose-coloured standpoint ; from a calamity he would make a fairy tale, showing that, in spite of adversity, the *House Beautiful* was still upon its hill-top.

I remarked, in introducing him, that he was guilty of playing a part in a mystery. You will have seen through the mystery by now ; at least, as regards his rose-coloured spectacles. But there is more to be said concerning his life and his love of books.

XII

WITH NATURE



XII

WITH NATURE

ANOTHER meeting with my friend of the rose-coloured spectacles was beneath a blue sky and in a ‘glow of sunlight.’ This was some while after a visit to the little room that formed his home, where I had seen certain photographs which had aroused my interest and curiosity.

‘Come,’ he wrote, ‘and saunter with me for an hour or two in the best stretch of country within easy reach of London, which, to us, shall be the best between the two Poles. Take rail to Hampstead and meet me near the flagstaff, overlooking the heath valley, at any hour you care to name. But, mark you, I only promise to *saunter*. I have no legs for hard walking, and even if I had, would prefer an easy pace. You remember Thoreau’s words in praise of sauntering: “I have met with but one or two persons in the course of my life who understood the art of Walking; that is, of taking walks—who had a genius, so to speak, for *sauntering*; which word is beautifully derived ‘from idle people who

roved about the country, in the Middle Ages, and asked charity, under pretence of going *a la Sainte Terre*, to the Holy Land, till the children exclaimed, ‘There goes a *Sainte-Terrer*,’ a Saunterer—a Holy Lander. They who never go to the Holy Land in their walks, as they pretend, are indeed mere idlers and vagabonds; but they who do go there are saunterers in the good sense, such as I mean. Some, however, would derive the word from *sans terre*, without land or a home, which, therefore, in the good sense, will mean having no particular home, but equally at home everywhere. For this is the secret of successful sauntering. He who sits still in a house all the time may be the greatest vagrant of all; but the saunterer, in the good sense, is no more vagrant than the meandering river, which is all the while sedulously seeking the shortest course to the sea. But I prefer the first, which indeed is the most probable derivation. For every walk is a sort of crusade, preached by some Peter the Hermit in us, to go forth and reconquer this Holy Land from the hands of the Infidels.”’

‘That is so very pleasingly and bravely expressed,’ the letter continued, ‘that I am hoping it will convert you to “the gentle pace.” But have no fear that my spirit will prove as slow as my legs. I

am still in possession of my rose-coloured spectacles, and can take full share in joy derived from pleasing thoughts and impressions.'

This, too, was bravely expressed ; for when I met my friend at the spot named, I was pained to find him considerably thinner and paler than at our last meeting. But his greeting was as cordial as on any previous occasion, and I was glad to find that his voice had lost none of its familiar ring of enjoyment.

' What think you of this passage ? ' he cried after an exchange of greetings. ' It is from a comparatively modern book—from a novel, to be precise, by Henry Harland. I fancy it should put us in the right mood for our saunter. There is an open estate across the heath into which we may go and find much of the splendour mentioned.'

As we sauntered forward, he read the passage for my benefit in his rich, musical voice : " " Beyond the shade, the sunshine broke into a mosaic of merry colours, on larkspur and iris, pansies and pink geraniums, jessamine, sweet-peas, tulips shameless in their extravagance of green and crimson, red and white carnations, red, white, and yellow roses. The sunshine broke into colour, it laughed, it danced, it almost rioted, among the flowers ; but in the

prim alleys, and on the formal hedges of box, and the quaintly clipped yews, and the old purple brick walls, where fruit-trees were trellised, it lay fast, fast asleep. Without the walls, in the cool greenery of the park, there was a perpetual drip-drip of bird-notes. This was the web upon which a chosen handful of more accomplished birds were embroidering and cross-embroidering their bold, clear arabesques of song.”’

You will notice that this pleasing passage is in lighter vein than the style of writing that usually won my friend’s admiration. I think the reason lay in his desire to show that a man might suffer from indifferent health and still enjoy a bright and lively spirit. I wish you could have heard him give voice to the following passage, as we made our way over the heath, through a wealth of fresh green undergrowth. He looked up, as he recited the words, at the blue sky, and spoke half playfully, half seriously :

“ “ The sky is an inverted bowl of blue Sèvres—that priceless bleu-royal. The air is full of gold like *can-de-vie de Dantzig*; if we only had a liquefying apparatus, we could recapture the first fine careless nectar of the gods, the poor dead gods of Greece. The earth is as aromatic as an orange stuck with

cloves ; I can't begin to tell you all the wondrous woody, mossy, racy things it smells of. And the birds, the robins and the throstles, the blackbirds and the blackcaps, the linnets and the little Jenny wrens, knowing the value of silence, are hoarding it like misers ; but, like prodigals, they're squandering sound. The ear of mortal never heard such a delirious, delicious, such a crystalline, argentine, ivory-smooth, velvety-soft, such a ravishing, such an enraptured tumult of sweet voices. Showers, cascades of pearls and rubies, emeralds, diamonds, sapphires.” ’

He laughed aloud, after the last word had left his lips, out of pure lightness of heart, then went on to speak of the value of pure air as a health restorer : ‘ Pure air and an unsophisticated spirit in the presence of Nature—these are the best medical appliances.’ Bright colour showed in his cheeks as he continued to speak in playful vein of the doctor and his pharmacopoeia. To his mind, Mother Nature was the best of doctors. Had not Stevenson and many others written in praise of the soothing influence of conditions such as we enjoyed that day, the happy impressions, the sense of peace and well-being ?

Then the conversation drifted into other channels,

and we fell to talking of the time spent together in my friend's little room—of his books, his pictures, his china, and of the photographs he had shown me. And here our talk took on a serious complexion ; but we were still conscious of the flood of sunlight, the happy surroundings. Therefore, our tone, though serious, had nothing of melancholy. I learnt that the photographs that had aroused my curiosity had been taken at an establishment in old Hampstead, now demolished. In those days my friend had lived in a large, well-appointed house overlooking the heath. His means had been ample, his position seemingly secure. But misfortune had come, business reverses, the failure of a company in which large interests were vested, the betrayal of a friend in whom confidence had been placed. Then followed the sickness and death of his wife and child.

I looked at my friend and marvelled at his courage in the face of such misfortunes. At our first meeting he had said that without his rose-coloured spectacles, his bright point of view, all seemed dark. The meaning of his words was now touchingly clear. How could he have continued to live had he not been blessed with an indomitable spirit ?

I wish I could give a faithful idea of the

inspiring manner in which he interwove his story with bright and consoling touches; but so much depended upon his manner, the inflexions of his voice, the expression in his eyes, that I cannot hope to convey an adequate impression. I can only say that no spark of hope or consolation escaped his gratitude; that his bright and cheerful spirit was as ‘pervasive as sweet lavender, unavoidable as the sunset before the westward-bound traveller.’ The blue sky above, the foliage around, the rich growth beneath our feet—all had their message. Nature was our ‘good host’ for the day, and he ‘looked through Nature up to Nature’s God.’

So the day passed by, and the shadows lengthened, but the light still shone upon the hill-tops; whilst the sun set in a glory of red. ‘I wonder,’ said my friend, ‘if you remember Thoreau’s beautiful passage: “We walked in so pure and bright a light, gilding the withered grass and leaves, so softly and serenely bright, I thought I had never bathed in such a golden flood, without a ripple or a murmur to it. The west of every wood and rising ground gleamed like the boundary of Elysium, and the sun on our backs seemed like a herdsman driving us home at evening.”

‘“ So we saunter towards the Holy Land, till one

day the sun shall shine more brightly than ever he has done, shall perchance shine into our minds and hearts, and light up our whole lives with a great awakening light, as warm and serene and golden as on a bankside in autumn."'

XIII

A PILGRIMAGE

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‘ So we saunter towards the Holy Land, till one day the sun shall shine more brightly than ever he has done, shall perchance shine into our minds and hearts, and light up our whole lives with a great awakening light, as warm and serene and golden as on a bankside in autumn.’ These were the last words I heard from my friend’s lips. He had a serious relapse, shortly after our visit to the country, and died within a few days. And now I am divided between a deep sense of personal loss and my duty to his memory. He would, I know, have had me look upon his journey to the ‘ Other Side ’ in the light of a pilgrimage, gone upon bravely, cheerfully, in perfect confidence.

By my side is a letter in which he speaks of this attitude in the course of a reference to our day in the country. ‘ I have been reading,’ he says, ‘ a volume of Mr. A. C. Benson’s essays, procured from a circulating library, and am filled with

gratitude for their soothing influence. The following passage from his essay on "Beauty" will recall the conversation we had at our last meeting—our day in the country : " Nature has a magic for many of us—that is to say, a secret power that strikes across our lives at intervals, with a message from an unknown region. And this message is aroused by symbols ; a tree, a flash of light on lonely clouds, a flower, a stream—simple things that we have seen a thousand times—have sometimes the power to cast a spell over our spirit, and to bring something that is great and incommunicable near us. This must be called magic, for it is not a thing which can be explained by ordinary laws, or defined in precise terms ; but the spell is there, real, insistent, undeniable ; it seems to make a bridge for the spirit to pass into a far-off, dimly apprehended region ; it gives us a sense of great issues and remote visions ; it leaves us with a longing which has no mortal fulfilment."'

' I mention this,' the letter continues, ' because it seems to me to lead to certain deep issues of life about which I have seldom spoken. I have always felt a certain diffidence in touching upon matters relating to the soul and the life hereafter. Yet, I have not let others do *all* the thinking. I have had

my own thoughts, my own visions. But, after all, refined speculations are of little use if there be not some tangible belief at the back of them. I like the passage just quoted, and I like the author's reference, in another part of the volume, to the guarded city of life. But I think the following passage makes the strongest appeal, for *all* may participate in the deep yet simple feelings expressed: "What are the thoughts of the mighty unresting heart, to whose vastness and agelessness the whole mass of these flying and glowing suns are but as a handful of dust that a boy flings upon the air? How has He set me here, a tiny moving atom, yet more sure of my own identity than I am of all the vast panorama of things which lie outside of me? Has He, indeed, a tender and patient thought of me, the frail creature whom He has moulded and made? I do not doubt it; I look upon the star-sown spaces, and the old aspiration rises in my heart, 'Oh, that I knew where I might find Him! that I might come into His presence!' How would I go, like a tired and sorrowful child to his father's knee, to be comforted and encouraged, in perfect trust and love, to be raised in His arms, to be held to His heart! He would but look in my face, and I should understand without a question, without a word."

When I think of this passage and others which were included in letters written by my friend during his illness, I see clearly that he must have realized that he stood on the brink of the unknown. But no fears were expressed. Indeed, I gathered nothing from his letters regarding his physical condition. He made no mention of sickness or pain, dropped no hint of weariness. On the contrary, the letters of which I speak struck a deeper and truer note of cheerfulness and courage than any previous communications from his hand. I like to think that he continued, as of old, to speak of his rose-coloured spectacles, his point of view. ‘The secret of a happy life,’ he remarks, in the letter from which I have just quoted, ‘consists in immediately clearing away the specks of dust which are so apt to fall upon one’s rose-coloured spectacles, the little annoyances, the petty worries, the hundred and one little dark specks which I leave you to name at your leisure.’

Then follows a deeper note, taken, I think, from Epictetus: ‘Happiness is not in strength, or wealth or power, or all three. It lies in ourselves, in true freedom, in the conquest of every ignoble fear, in perfect self-government, in a power of contentment and peace, the even flow of life, even in poverty,

exile, disease, and the very valley of the shadow of death.'

' So you see,' my friend continues, ' there are also dark fogs and thick mists against which the would-be cheerful man must contend—deep trials compared to which our daily petty annoyances are, indeed, but specks of dust. But these, too, may be overcome. The truth is "the cheerful life is neither a matter of circumstance nor of temperament. It is a gift of God, and we can covet no better gift. The black hag of care can no longer sit on the shoulder of the man whose cheerfulness is the child of reason, not of impulse ; whose heart is light because he can trust, not because the sky is blue and the world smiling."'

I wish I could give you some account, from personal knowledge, of the way my friend spent his last days. This I cannot do, for many miles stood between us. But I am told by those who nursed him that up till the end his mind retained its clearness and vigour ; that he never ceased to take an interest in his surroundings, in the great world outside his little room, in the many ill-favoured ones whom he had befriended.

Close by my side stands a shelf upon which are stored a number of volumes from his library. They are typical of his treasured collection, some of the

best of the world's best books, each volume showing signs of much reading and meditation, each page bearing marginal notes—original observations and thoughts from other sources, showing how one great writer differed from others, or, in the main, was of like opinion with his contemporaries. Many of the observations seem to me to be remarkably fresh and interesting—quite simple, it is true, but of the type of simplicity that captivates.

I shall hope to set down some of these, together with the passages to which they refer. Here is one example, which will serve to convey an idea of my friend's manner of commenting upon an author's words. The passage in point reads thus : ‘When thou hast been compelled by circumstances to be disturbed in a manner, quickly return to thyself, and do not remain out of tune longer than the compulsion lasts ; for thou wilt have more mastery over the harmony by continually recurring to it.’ By the side of this, written in lead pencil, are the following words : ‘Might not human life be compared to an orchestra, composed of all kinds of instruments ? I mean that each of our natures is, so to say, an instrument, some more pleasing and, seemingly, more useful than others ; but of equal value when played in accord with the combined orchestra.

And if we, at any time, drop out of tune, is it not because we have failed to give our attention to the Great Conductor of all ? '

They tell me that towards the end he referred repeatedly to the help he had derived from keeping his spiritual vision clear, his faith unclouded. So far as I can gather, his closing words were these : ' Faith kept in lively exercise can make roses spring out of the midst of thorns, and change the briers of the wilderness into the fruit-trees of Paradise.'

XIV

FAREWELL



XIV

FAREWELL

I HAVE attained my desire : I have introduced you to a true book-lover. And if you wonder why I have chosen a life shadowed by sorrow, I answer that love comes that way. 'Tis no new teaching, that which shows how sorrow and tribulation are the paths by which men travel to perfection. We start upon life's journey with a glad cry ; but many fall from the ranks some distance from the 'first milestone,' and fortunate are the fallen ones who find an open book by the wayside.

It was thus the love of books came to my friend of the rose-coloured spectacles. Shadows fell across his path, and he fell from the ranks ; but out of the shadows came sweet voices, telling of gentle fancies and strength-giving realities. This was the road (need I hesitate in confessing it ?) upon which I, too, came by the love of books.

Oh ! how much we book-lovers owe to 'those little sheets of paper that teach us, comfort us, open their hearts to us as brothers. . . . We ought to

(and surely do) reverence books, to look upon them as good and mighty things. Whether they are about religion or politics, farming, trade, or medicine, they are messages of the Teacher of all truth.'

More cannot be said. And so farewell, fellow book-lover. May you find upon the way many wise and friendly books.

But wait ! I hear as though voiced in clear tones the beautiful passage to be found in the little *book-friend* whose name is on so many lips. Let me follow the pleasing example of my friend of the rose-coloured spectacles. Let me echo the brief passage before I take leave of you : ' It is scarcely farewell, for my road is ubiquitous, eternal ; there are green ways in Paradise and golden streets in the beautiful City of God. Nevertheless my heart is heavy ; for, viewed by the light of the waning year, roadmending seems a great and wonderful work which I have poorly conceived of and meanly performed : yet I have learnt to understand dimly the truths of the three paradoxes—the blessing of a curse, the voice of silence, the companionship of solitude—and so take my leave of this stretch of the road, and of you who have fared along the white highway through the medium of a printed page.'

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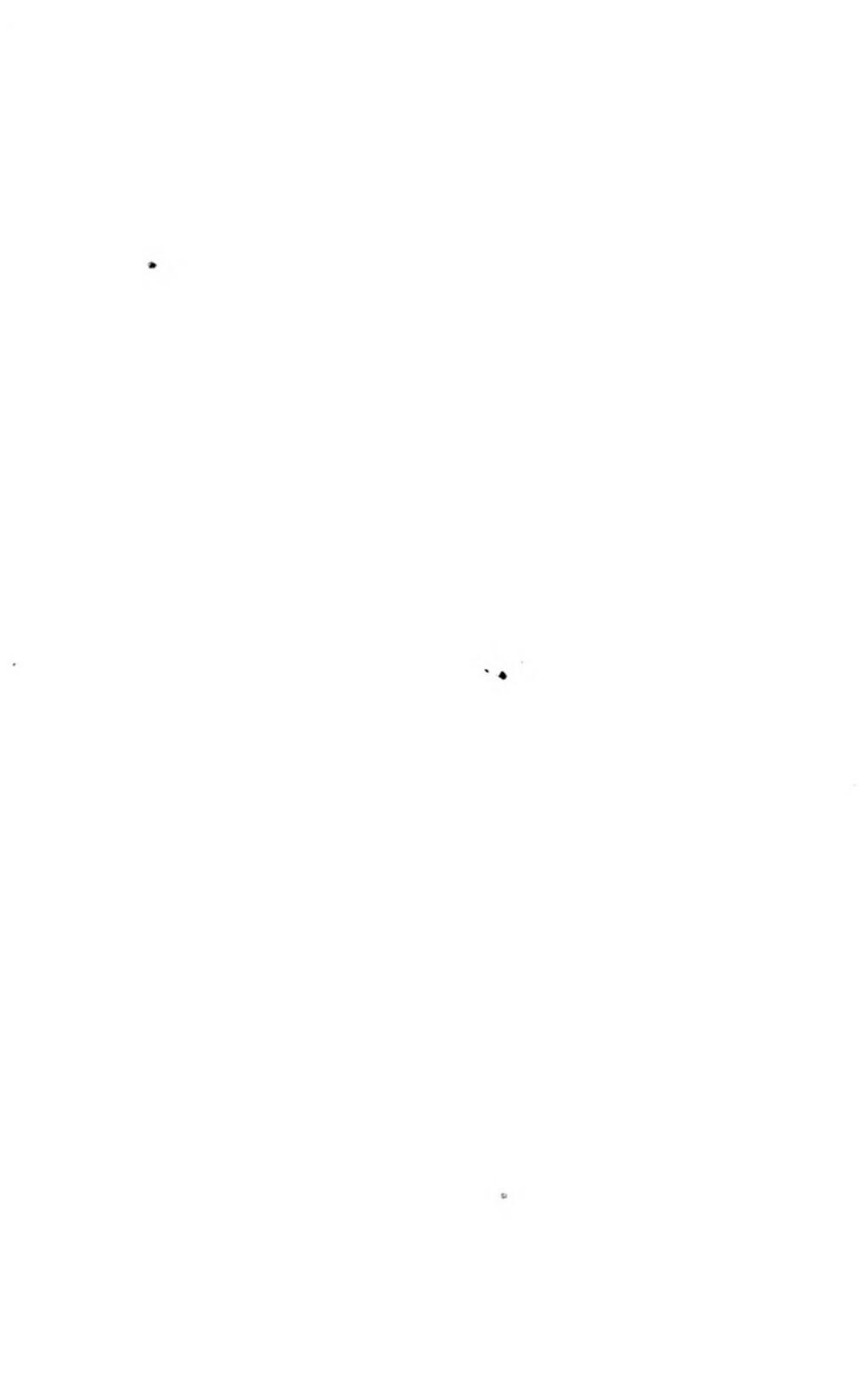
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